

Daryl K. Roberts, Retired Chief of Police, Hartford PD

In Support of SB 280 to Repeal the Death Penalty

I have been a police officer for more than half of my life. For thirty years I served as everything from a line officer to the Chief of police. For the last 5 years I had the honor of serving as the Chief of Police for the Hartford PD.

I can tell you with professional certainty: the death penalty does nothing for law enforcement. My goal as an officer is to serve our communities, keep them safe, work to prevent crime, and when needed, solve crimes and apprehend offenders. There are lots of things that help police do this work effectively – sufficient training and support in the department, as well as elements in the communities like

For serving our communities, the death penalty is irrelevant. The notion that the death penalty is a deterrent is absurd. People argue about what the data says about deterrence, but I can say based on over thirty years of dealing with the most hardened and calculated offenders: the death penalty is not a deterrent. I have seen the “worst of the worst” that you read about. I know how they think and I can assure you they do not consider the death penalty. Having the death penalty or not will have no effect on these individuals because they do not expect to get caught. Many are mentally ill, or acting in a moment of passion, or are sociopaths with delusions of grandeur and never expect to be caught. The death penalty is the farthest thing from their minds.

Police chiefs from around the country have agreed with me on this. In a 2009 survey, randomly selected police chiefs from around the country were asked to rank the death penalty as a tool for deterring violent crime. The vast majority of Chiefs listed the death penalty as the lowest priority. Of course they did, because the death penalty does nothing to help us with our work.

In fact, from all I’ve experienced, I think the death penalty is in fact a hindrance to law enforcement. I have devoted my career to developing programs that we know would help keep our communities safe: educational programs and programs for community involvement. Some of these programs are suffering in these times of tough budget cuts. If given the choice between our ineffective death penalty or effective community crime prevention programs, I would choose the latter every time.

Finally, I see time and again how the death penalty does nothing to help surviving victims. I say this as both a first responder and the cousin of a murder victim. My cousin was murdered one day when a gang-banger shot 8 people in a crowd in Hartford. The death penalty in CT did nothing to prevent this murder, victims’ families like law enforcement, want programs that will stop crimes from occurring in the first place – this is our priority. Additionally, I’ve seen how the death penalty process can ensnare some families in a decades long wait for finality. This is wrong.

Over the last three decades working in law enforcement time and again I have seen what officers, victims, and communities need, and I assure you it is not the death penalty. It death penalty is irrelevant at best, a tremendous distraction at worst. Please repeal the death penalty this year.